

Teachers' Perception of Process - Blended Teaching: A Study of Secondary School English Language Teacher of Kerala State

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The article is an enquiry to know the attitude of the teachers to process-oriented English language teaching in secondary schools of Kerala State. The opinion of the teachers, their suggestions, and the view of the research scholar along with recommendations are included in it.

Keywords: Learning, Curriculum, Secondary School and Kerala State.

Introduction

The Secondary Education Commission Report (1952) comments, "a serious defect which vitiates present day teaching is its excessive domination by verbalism i.e. the tendency to identify knowledge with words, that delusion that if a student is able to memorize or repeat certain words or phrases, he had grasped the facts or ideas that they are meant to convey." The Kothari Commission (1964) says that "the average school today instructs still confines to a mechanical routine continues to be dominated by the old besetting evil of verbalism remains as dull and inspiring as before." It is pointed out that there has been a steady deterioration of educational standards as compared with the standard that existed earlier and the standard maintained by other countries. The main cause for such a pathetic condition is because India's education is through ears and not through eyes. Pupils are mere passive listeners. There is no scope for participation and interaction. There is no chance for divergent and reflective thinking. English teaching becomes a spoon – feeding process. All facts and concepts in English are imposed in a mechanical way. Classrooms are teacher dominated. For majority students learning English is like eating a green chili and then gulping down a glass of boiling water.

UNESCO in their report Learning: The Treasure Within emphasized the need for process – blended teaching for the development of human potential to its fullest for meeting the challenges of globalization in the 21st century. Process –blended learning includes acquisition of new abilities and new skills. Learning is the acquisition of new mental schemata, knowledge, abilities, skills etc., which can be used to solve problems, potentially more successfully, furthering decision making on the basis of experience, which elevates "doing" as a basis for achieving an effective understanding of the knowledge (Pazos, Azpiazu, Silva & Rodriguez-Paton, 2002). Educators are not alone in recognizing the development of soft skills among pupil.

As we are facing the challenges of globalization and liberalization, getting a better job and facing the worldwide competition, ability in decision making, higher order thinking skills, leadership both individual and group, personal attributes including work ethics, flexibility, initiative and motivation problem solving, team building are important. Society needs citizens who can evaluate the relevance of different perspectives on complex problems. To explore this issue in detail the investigator designed a study in which he interviewed subject experts and distributed questionnaire to secondary school English language teachers to ascertain the extent to which process- blended strategies are implemented in the English classrooms as a part of instruction.

Addressing the Problem

The government of Kerala through State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) implemented child – centred, process blended textbooks and grading system in the state. It is based on the concept that the study of English does not aim at the collection of large quantity of information related to various aspects of society. On the contrary it aims to inculcate social consciousness among learners. Social awareness will not emerge by merely memorizing information gathered from textbooks and classrooms. Opportunity shall be provided to the learners to gather information for solving problems through process blended - learning, analyze that information and arrive at independent conclusions and to express their own ideas through the participation in seminars and discussions. Equal importance is to be given to the content and process in the study of social science. The existing system needed further exploration to understand and explain the existing phenomena and eventually find a solution. The researcher designed the study to answer the following aspects.

- Are English language teacher’s familiar with process-blended learning strategies?
- Do they use activities as part of their English instruction? When teachers involve students in process-blended learning strategies, what difficulties do they encounter?
- How closely are strategies related to the content of textbook?

Research Focus

The study's purpose was to discover themes or concepts in the collected data that formed building blocks of grounded theory in the study of secondary school, English language teachers' perspectives. The collected data included interviews, classroom observations, publication materials, textbook, and teacher's hand book. The researcher prepared an interview schedule for pooling the opinion of experts in the field of English. The researcher has gone through a good number of books and periodicals to get a thorough knowledge in the field of study. The ideas thus obtained were supplemented with the information collected from experts in the field and experienced teachers. The investigator discussed these ideas with co-workers to know the outcomes of the study. Some selected history teachers of schools and heads of the schools were also consulted. The researcher prepared a questionnaire and its face validity was determined on the basis of the suggestions of the teachers and experts. The questionnaire used for teachers consisted of 30 items and had 5 major parts.

The first part of the questionnaire is related to the personal data of the respondent. The researcher wanted to know the respondent's personal data such as name, qualification, service, sex, type of school etc. The part is about English curriculum. The researcher attempted to know the features of present English curriculum. He attempted to know whether the curriculum is sufficient for achieving the important educational objectives such as environmental awareness, perspective regarding life of people and culture of the society, creative thinking, observation skill, an understanding regarding how the past events have influence present systems of society, inquiry skill, creates enough curiosity and interest for learning English, desirable social attitudes and values, national and international understanding, problem solving ability, co- operative mentality, broad humanitarian outlook and to develop an attitude against violence, war and hatred etc.

In the third part, the researcher intended to know about the content of English textbook. The researcher made an attempt to know whether it was satisfactory or not. In the fourth part the researcher attempted to know the major strategies followed in teaching English in secondary schools. The researcher also wanted to know merits and de-merits of various methods of teaching, the extent of adoption of these methods by teachers in teaching of social science. The last part was about the evaluation procedures. The researcher intends to know how the teacher continuously evaluates the pupil in the process - blended class room.

A total of 236 English language teachers were selected for the study. Out of which 45.1 percentage of English language teachers are from Government schools, 31.19 percentage of English language teachers are from aided schools and the remaining 23.63 percentage of English language teachers are from unaided schools. The percentage of teachers belonging to rural and urban area is 34.1 and 65.81 percentages respectively. The percentage of teachers belonging to English and Malayalam media are 45.63 and 54.35 percentages respectively. After selecting the schools, the investigator sent the questionnaire to teachers by post. The obtained responses were scrutinized and only those found complete and correct were chosen for analysis. The responses were converted to scores by giving 1 score to positive responses and zero to negative responses. The data were converted to tabular forms for analysis and findings. The data were compiled and classified for meaningful interpretation.

Findings

An analysis of study revealed a variety of important information related to the teaching of English. First, most teachers were not familiar with implementation of strategies in the classrooms. It spoils the basic concept of 'process-blended classrooms'. Most teachers did not use strategies in their instruction that support process-blended classrooms. Students are of the opinion that they were not encouraged to do activities in the class. Classroom observations of the researcher supported this argument.

When teachers were asked what problems, they might have in process-oriented- teaching, they responded that there would be problems related to students. They indicated that students had no time to deal with activities. The class sizes were too large (the average class size was about forty students) to effectively do activities. Some teachers argued that students are not serious in doing activities. While doing activities in the class, most students were in a kidding state. One teacher responded that, I am always serious in class, but if students make fun of the discussion; the

results won't be as good as expected. They are kidding the classroom activities. As a result, the process of continuous and comprehensive evaluation is not so possible. Most students give importance in passing the examination with high marks through rote memorization because their expectation is to secure a seat in the entrance exam and get a safe job.

The physical atmosphere of most schools was not at all satisfactory. The school equipment was insufficient for teaching process - blended classrooms. Participants expressed the need for more books in the library, overhead projectors, DVD, television and internet connection. A teacher observed about the physical atmosphere of her school in the following words. In the past, we don't have a library and laboratory facilities. Today we have library, laboratory, computer lab etc., but still, we don't have enough books, computer and lab equipment. All these pose big problems. The establishments of multi-media labs are the crying needs of the hour.

Teachers expressed the opinion that covering the content in the text takes too much time, leaving little for activities. In addition, teacher's handbook does not provide any guidelines to teachers in handling process-oriented classrooms. A teacher expressed her opinion towards the textbook by saying, The English textbooks are overloaded. It fails to provide opportunity for the physical, mental, social and emotional development of the learner. We don't get proper training in the new approach. We have participated in some training programmes and cluster meetings, but are not properly organized. Our sourcebook and handbook fail to give confidence in the process-blended approach. Process oriented teaching increases workload. Teachers are not getting time to guide pupils for projects, assignments, seminars, collections, class texts, practical and other transactional strategies during school hours along with teaching. A teacher opined her grievances like this –

Most students are unaware of doing projects, assignments, seminars, and collections. We don't get proper training in the new system. Our sourcebook and handbook give information about content and ignore the process. Neither the government nor the department gives support to process-blended teaching.

Though innovative approaches like process- approach, pupil –centred, activity-oriented approach and continuous and comprehensive evaluation are introduced in classroom instruction, the teacher - pupil ratio remain to be the same. This is found to be a hurdle in effecting innovations to introduce English language Recommendations in the light of the study the researcher proposes the following recommendations.

Process - blended teaching is needed in secondary school English classrooms, because students at this stage demands acquisition of skills and development of attitudes and values and participation in actions through activities, projects, field interactions and co-curricular activities. At this stage focus needs to be on development of critical thinking ability, problem solving skills and participation in pro-active action in community settings. Schools have the noble role to socialize the pupil. Schools should act as a miniature of the society and teachers should act as agents of society to help students in their ongoing process of socialization. Curricular organization should be based on social needs and social expectations. The school life divorced from direct life experience is futile and rather destructive. So, a learner must be acquainted with such experience which is relevant to his or her social life. This acquaintance makes the learner able to solve the social problem and satisfy the social needs. So, school must play an active part to relate itself with the society.

Society is an ever-changing entity. All changes in social life are concomitant with the changes of human need. A school has to keep pace with the changing society and to do that the curriculum should be reviewed regularly keeping in mind the change in social demand and needs. School directs the society, reforms the society and ensure the progress of the society by analyzing the principles and rules and selecting only those which have some good effects on society. If the school fails to do it, the society will become a stagnant organization.

Teachers should be trained in using Audio- Visual aids. All the English language teachers of secondary schools should be given an intensive training for one month during summer vacation in the new approach and techniques of teaching and evaluation. A Year Plan should be worked out by the concerned teacher at the end of this workshop. A copy of this programme should be given to the head of school and inspecting officer for follow up studies. Teacher - pupil ratio and number of periods should be reduced to enable the teacher to organize 'process- oriented and pupil - centred 'activities' for continuous and comprehensive evaluation. It may also ensure maximum interaction between teachers and pupils and maximum potential can be drawn out. Special teachers should be appointed for grading Part II (Co - scholastic areas such as work experience, health and physical education and arts).

Content of English textbook should be reduced to enable the teacher to organize process-oriented and pupil -centred activities. As a part of skill development, opportunities should be given to students to visit places of historical importance, monuments, temples of historical importance, ancient mosques, palaces etc. Time-bound steps should be taken to provide sufficient infrastructural facilities, teaching aids, supporting materials and reference books in all schools. Handbook and sourcebook should be prepared by experts in methodology-, content and evaluation and specifically state how to implement this strategy in ordinary classroom. There should be a state- level monitoring cell to correct and aid the activities of English language teachers.

Training should be given to teachers in diagnostic test, differential teaching and continuous assessment of pupils on the basis of different tools of evaluation such as check list, rating scales, anecdotal records and other observational techniques in addition to written or oral tests. Special programmes should be worked out for building desirable social attitudes and values related to higher education for each class. Co- curricular activities suitable for each institution should be worked out.

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